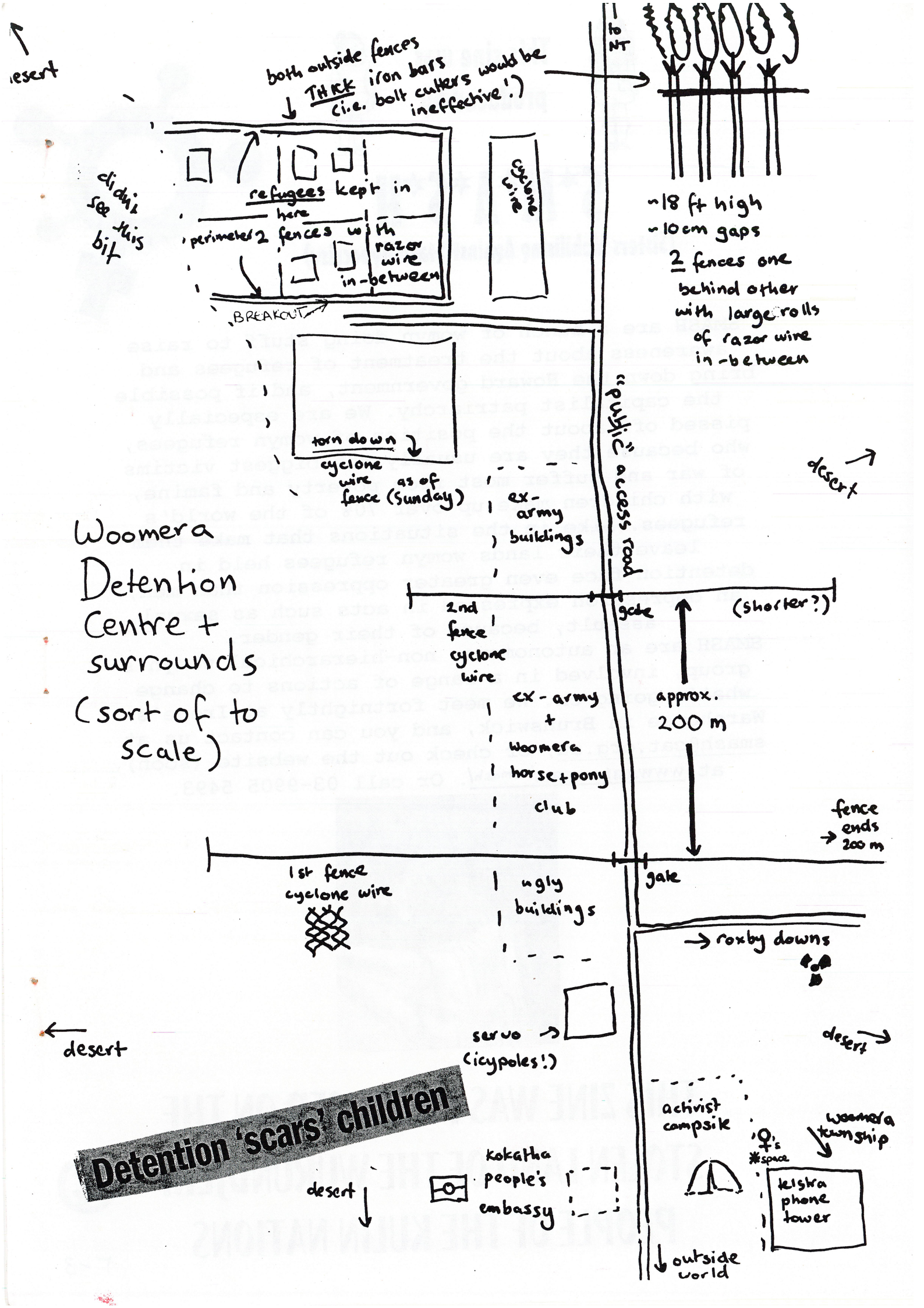
Greetings
from Woomera
S*M*A*S*H ZINE #1 JUN 20



Detention 'scars' children

This zine was produced by

S*M*A*S*H

(Sisters Mobilising Against State Hypocrisy)

SMASH are a bunch of womyn doing stuff to raise awareness about the treatment of refugees and bring down the Howard government, and if possible the capitalist patriarchy. We are especially pissed off about the position of womyn refugees, who because they are usually the biggest victims of war and suffer most from poverty and famine, with children make up over 70% of the world's refugees. Like in the situations that make them leave their lands womyn refugees held in detention face even greater oppression than men, an oppression expressed in acts such as sexual assault, because of their gender.

SMASH are an autonomous, non-hierarchical womyn's group, involved in a range of actions to change what's going on. We meet fortnightly at Irene's Warehouse in Brunswick, and you can contact us at smash@cat.org.au, or check out the website (soon) at www.cat.org.au/~smash/. Or call 03-9905 5493.

THIS ZINE WAS PRODUCED ON THE STOLEN LAND OF THE WURUNDJERI PEOPLE OF THE KULIN NATIONS

I AM NOT YOU

I am collateral damage, I am a queue jumper, I am a terrorist, I am not white and I do not wear a military uniform.

I am a white male, I am a US soldier, everything I do involves the defence of freedom, my life is naturally worth more. I cannot be criticised.

I am a refugee, I was told they were bombing the homes of my friends and family for our own liberation. Because of this liberation I had to leave my country. I arrived in a distant nation who sends men in uniform to fight for freedom in my homeland, but I was told that my very existence was a threat to this freedom and I was locked away.

I am a member of an elite SAS squad, I care about terrorism. Terrorism blew up the World Trade Center and killed my brethren. I care about killing the oppressors, I do not care about those they oppress. If someone is Muslim they are my enemy, I'll be damned if they get a chance to enjoy the freedom and democracy I am fighting for.

I am an Hazara Afghani, I was oppressed by the Taliban. The Taliban are my enemy. Why do the men in Western military uniform hurt me, why do they seem to want to kill me by destroying my village that was almost rubble anyway. I thought they were on my side.

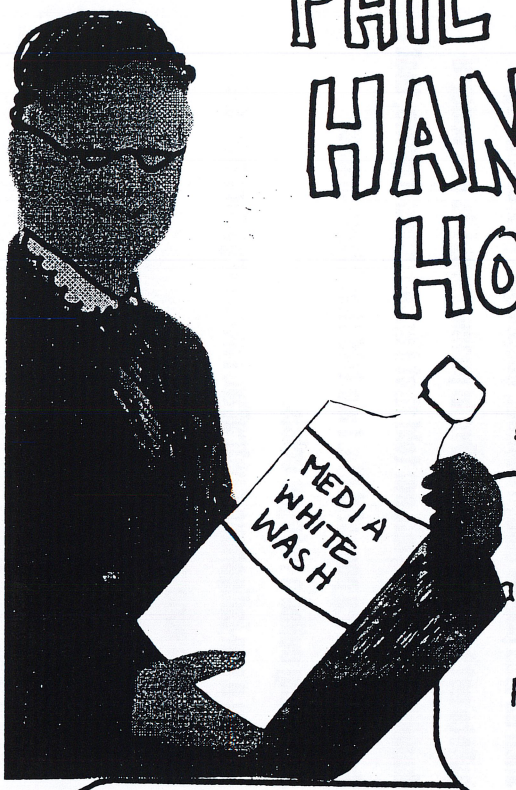
I am an American I do not care why we were attacked on September 11th 2000, I only care about revenge. I do not care that over 3000 Afghani civilians have been killed as part of the military campaign exacting revenge on my behalf.

I am in an Australian detention centre in the desert. I do not know what I have done wrong. I do not know why when the UN man in Pakistan said I have refugee status these people called DIMA have not given me a visa. I have been told that in countries such as this people enjoy freedom, people gain power through ballets not bullets. I want to live in peace, I want to live under a democratic system, but am told that I have jumped a queue, that I do not deserve a peaceful life. I am told that I have caused something called a refugee crisis.

I am a non-indigenous Australian. I have forgotten that my family were once refugees.

AUNTIE PHIL'S HANDY HOME HINTS

HOW TO CLEAN UP THOSE PESKY HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES THAT JUST **WON'T WASH OUT**



Tip #1: Make sure you move your embarrasing abuses out of sight! Behind the dresser, under the rug or out in the middle of the dessert will do. People will soon forget how bad they are & pretty soon they may forget they even existed at all!

Tip #2: The vital ingredient is **MEDIA WHITEWASH**. I swear by the stuff! You wouldn't believe the muddles it's got me out of.

Tip #3: Establish a sense of collective superiority. You'll be surprised how easy it is! In no time people will start to see yourvictims as virtually subhuman.

Tip #4: Create false divisions between people. This is a great little trick that my mother-in-law Adolf taught me. You just whip up some patriotic fervour and pretty soon even the most oppressed sectors of your society will side with the ruling powers rather than their potential brothers and sisters across the sea

THE FINAL STEP is to create an ongoing cleaning routine of historical amnesia. After a few months people will feel like they esist in a **SHINY, CLEAN** bubble of **WHITENESS!**

A JOURNEY TO A CONCENTRATION CAMP: A LAND DISPOSSESSED.

This is my second time to Woomera, a tiny isolated town set up by the military for the military. The first time the weather was overcast so the land felt even more isolating, like a terrible damage had been done to the land. This land belongs to Kokatha people, but through white people's colonisation and how the industry of incarcerating people, the land is being dispossessed and stolen in a continuous cycle. On the first bus trip to Woomera I tried to imagine being a refugee travelling in a bus overnight- like I had been to travelling in a land with no lights for hours and not knowing you are going end up in a Woomera detention centre. This is not how I travelled to Woomera both times with friends and wonderful womyn.

GOOD FRIDAY AT WOOMERA.

Arrive at Woomera to a roadblock of police to be told our bus can't get in, so we walk with our bags and camping equipment across the desolated land to the Woomera camp of activists we arrive to a camp of panic. Refugees had escaped and were in the demonstrator's camp. Refugees were telling activists that they would rather die than go back to the detention centres. Police were everywhere that night. I wasn't actually there when the refugees escaped, but from the video footage later, I would have done anything to help the refugees escape. What else could you do when a person in desperate circumstances skydives into a crowd of people for freedom? In addition, when you see a person through bars with cuts all over their bodies to me its seems hypocritical "we really support you, but we're going now and you can stay behind the bars.

The trip to Woomera exemplified life to the nth degree. It was a great community of people and activists at our "camp". The creativity of people was excellent. The SMASH (Sisters Mobilising Against State Hypocrisy). women's group weaved orange plastic into the fences saying "free Kokatha Land".

At the start of Friday night a few activists heard the heartbreaking stories and the physical signs of torture and fear in the detainee's bodies. At the end of the night after being shown a bit of humanity refugees became a little more relaxed and were laughing. However, ex- inmates of Australia's concentration camps unfortunately will wake up in cold sweats for years to come. This was the greatest sadness of the trip, because of the refugee's horrific experiences, but also the dispossession of the land from the Kokatha people.

EASTER SUNDAY:

We gather around midday to walk to the centre. A small contingent of activists and others in lycra (yes in the desert) and walk across the hot, rocky land to the concentration camp, so through red dust and heat to the edge of the camp I'm amazed and horrified to see people behind and layer upon layers of wire and bars. It was great to be able to wave to the detainees to show them that you are there and support them, however it does not seem enough. There's also a sense you are watching a horrific circus act performed

by the state. I feel a sense of disgust in myself, when I think or get excited and say to myself or outwardly "I saw the refugees and heard the refugees; they are real. At Woomera it was incredible to see the banners refugees had been able to paint despite the constant eye of the ACM guards. Anyway, the banners said: "We are victims of politics. We are refugees. Have request from Australian people for help". Another one says something like "We don't need detention, just protection." It is terrifying out here. The police and special forces are all in leather with leather boots and in these full-on vests to protect themselves from protestors. I don't know who protects the refugees. A few protesters walk right to the front of the fence to talk to the detainees but police come on horses and push them out of the way and hurt some of the protestors.

We keep walking the edge of the camp with police following in a game of cat and mouse. It's like a scene from "Max", the people. We reach the other side of the camp, and see children and women behind the bars of oppression. A child is perched on fathers? shoulders. Children often come to Australia unaccompanied by adults when they arrive on the boats. Their parents may have died on the boats or via persecution in the countries they have fled from. Ruddock and his cronies call these children "illegal" and not "genuine" refugees. A detainee talks to the crowds of protestors with translation from an activist in the crowd. A woman detainee screams and screams. "That we are not animals". Her screams demonstrate the pain and inhumanity of imprisoning people in a land that is red and scarred. I will always try and remember her expression of pain until the concentration/detention camps are abolished. There are rumours that the police cry at the women's screaming.

We go back to or tents hot and thirsty, but we are free. Someone hoses us down with water. I smile and squeal with joy and relief. I wish the detainees could feel this joy.

MONDAY

I sorely wave goodbye to the SMASH womyn. I've decided to go the on the Woomera Network bus for the trip home, because they are stopping to hold a protest at the proposed new detention centre at Baxter. We finally leave Woomera. It feels yuck leaving people locked up. The police check our bus for escaped refugees. A checkpoint created by a police society. One of our passengers is asked for ID because he is not quite "white enough", so we all show our ID'S. Finally we get to Baxter, a military base out of Port Augusta. For this protest we have not gained the permission from the local indigenous community. Some activists chose to stay in the bus, because we have not gained permission.

Is Baxter better? No detention is better. It is slightly cooler here, because Port Augusta is situated near the sea. However, military bases are not just for human beings and you certainly can't call them home. The base is surrounded by mountains and a railway. But still if this becomes a detention centre it is still isolated and horrible. I can imagine refugees climbing mountains and catching trains to escape another misery.

Finally I hope we soon get rid of these concentration camps and people can have time to heal and feel the liberation of freedom.

News Room

Immigration Minister Signs Afghan Agreement

MPS 34/2002

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Philip Ruddock, has signed an agreement with the Interim Administration of Afghanistan on the return of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers.

"The agreement represents a mutual understanding between Australia and Afghanistan for the voluntary return, with dignity and in safety, of Afghans who do not engage Australia's protection obligations," Mr Ruddock said.

"So far this year, more than three quarters of a million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries, including about 600-thousand under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

"These returns are evidence that great progress has been made in Afghanistan but there is still a long way to go. Australia is committed to help assist Afghanistan in its reconstruction."

Mr Ruddock met a number of Afghan Government Ministers, including the Chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration, Ministers for Refugee Affairs and Returnees, Justice, and the acting Foreign Minister.

They discussed a range of issues including people smuggling, border protection, and the global displacement of millions of Afghans after twenty years of conflict.

* "The Ministers I met emphasised the stability and safety that has been be brought to the region and I was able to see the evidence of this in moving around Kabul," Mr Ruddock said.

The Minister also met with local representatives of the International Organisation of Migration and UNHCR to be briefed on the progress of their local operations in repatriating large numbers of Afghans wishing to return home.

17 May 2002

BLATANT

A-8

Afghanistan

This Advice is current for Tuesday 09 July 2002 EST
The Advice was issued on Thursday 04 July 2002 EST

This advice has been reviewed. It contains new information or advice but the overall level of advice has not been changed.

Australians should defer all travel to Afghanistan until further notice. Australians in Afghanistan despite this warning should register with the Australian High Commission in Islamabad, exercise extreme security awareness and keep themselves informed of developments within the country.

Safety and Security

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In response to the terrorist attacks in the United States of America, the international coalition has been conducting a military campaign in Afghanistan since 7 October 2001. The campaign continues, although on a reduced scale. The security situation in Afghanistan remains very uncertain outside Kabul and overland travel outside the city carries significant danger. Warlords control many areas and travel in these areas can be very dangerous. There is the added danger that some Taliban and al-Qaida fighters may remain in parts of the country thereby creating a significant security risk.

Mr Karzai, Leader of Afghanistan's Interim Authority, has now been appointed Head of the Afghanistan Transitional Government which will administer the country until general elections are held in 18 months time.

General

Australians travelling by road in Afghanistan should ensure that their vehicles travel in a protected convoy. Banditry in rural areas by armed groups is common.

There are strong Islamic codes of dress and behaviour in Afghanistan and care should be taken to avoid giving rise to offence. Care should be taken not to breach regulations governing the import of certain prohibited items into the country.

All Australians in Afghanistan are urged to register with the Australian High Commission in Islamabad, and to report on their absences and final departure dates from the country.

HYPOCRISY

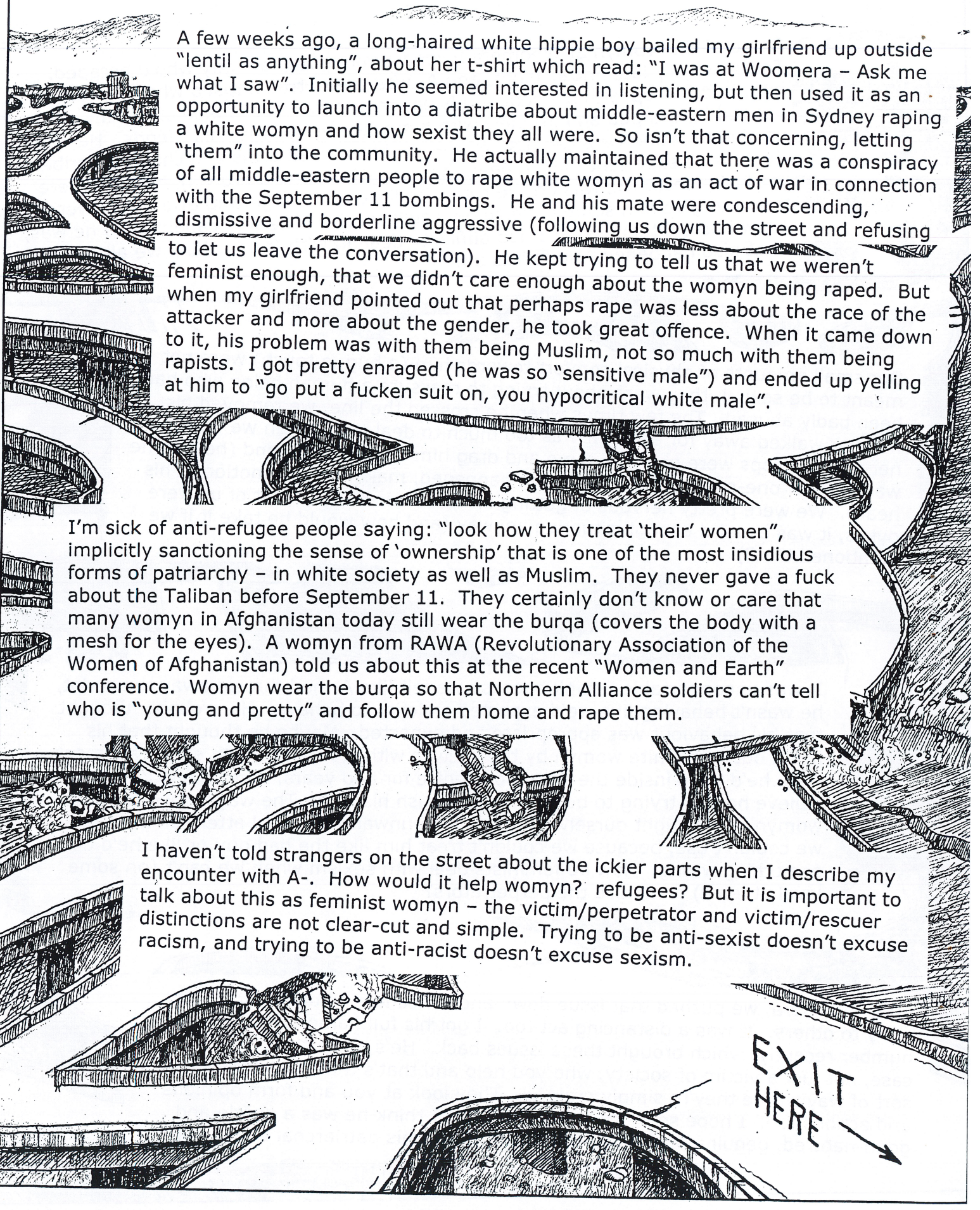
Thinking about sexism and racism after Woomera

Some of the womyn at Woomera helped a young Afghani guy who'd escaped. This was very late Friday night, and A- was pretty traumatised when we found him, huddled up with his head in his hands. Some of us looked after him, hugged him, taped an interview with him while he sat with his friends. He told us about his suicide attempts, showed us his scarred arms and chest, described the horrific experiences he'd been through. Us sitting there with him, we were the lucky ones. He was on the run, with little hope of getting away. We were trying to give him some hope so he would survive if he was caught (and he was, a few hours later). What I had difficulty dealing with (and I think we all did) was what also happened. He felt us up.

Our small amounts of physical comfort towards him (a hug, a touch) were not meant to be sexual, they were about trying to reassure a human being who had been badly abused. The few times when he crossed the line, we removed his hand or walked away for a bit. It was too much to deal with, when we were nervous the cops were going to come and drag him off at any second (he said he wanted the "one-second solution" if that happened, making a gun motion at his head). We were pretty nervous of getting arrested ourselves. Most of us were dykes, it was a weird enough situation anyway (and how would he take it if we mentioned that?).

It was uncomfortable I think because we felt like A- had thrown away the script, he wasn't behaving like we'd expected a victim to behave. He probably thought that his behaviour was appropriate and expected. Maybe he thought that his being out with white womyn by themselves without men was an encouragement. Also, he'd been inside the detention centre for two years. I certainly don't believe he was trying to be offensive or push his luck. The ways in which we as womyn have taught ourselves to deal with unwanted sexual attention from men we couldn't use, because we couldn't treat him like the bad guy or like he'd done something wrong. How do feminists deal with sexism when we can't (on some level at least) demonise the perpetrators?

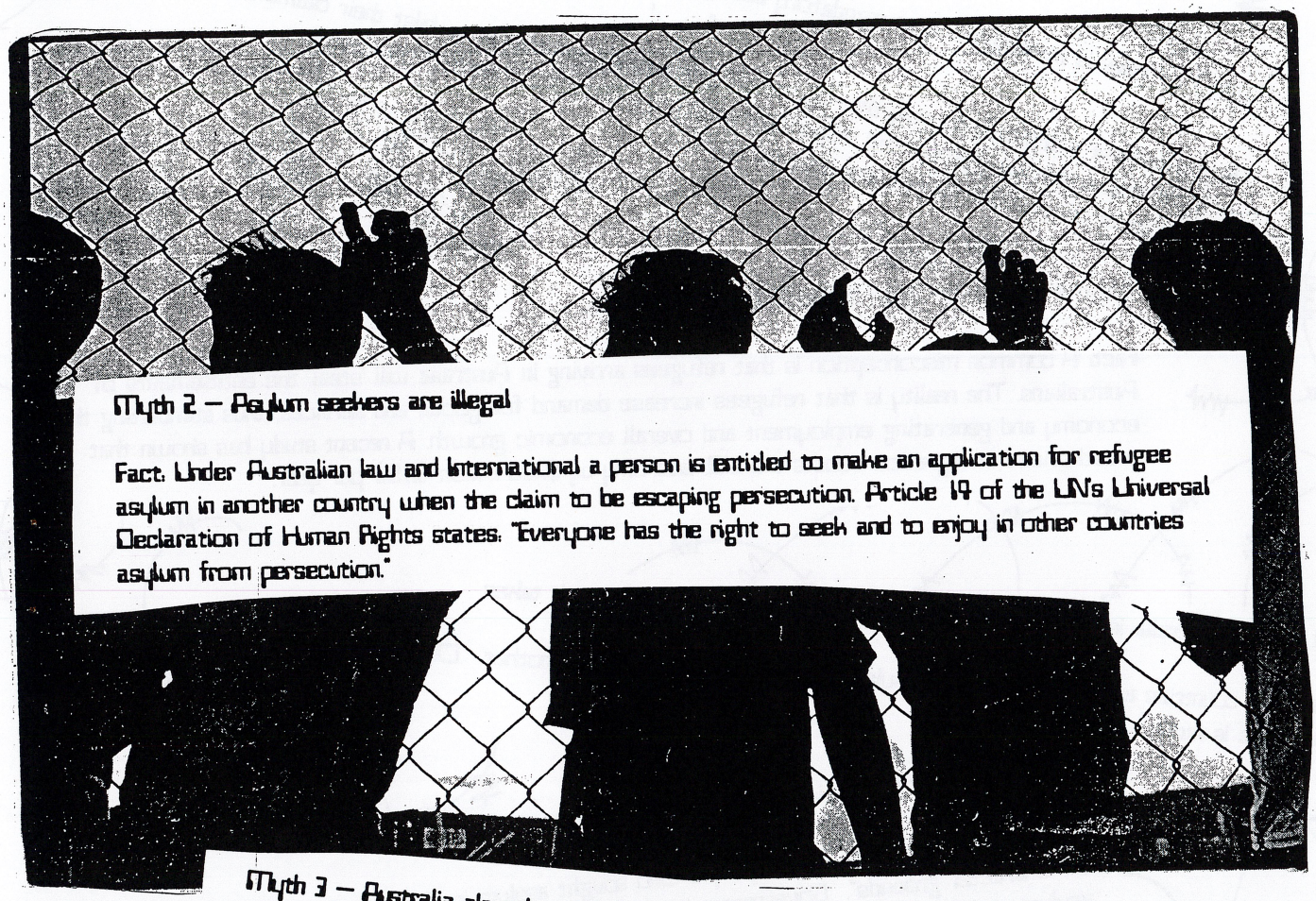
After Woomera, we pushed that issue down and concentrated on telling A-'s story to others. It was a distancing act too. I got his full name and detention number recently, which brought these issues back. He's not just a human rights case, not just a victim of society, who you help and that's that, in a one-sided sort of way where they're simply grateful. They look at you and form opinions and actions too. I hope so much that he is okay, I think he was a gentle and good-natured, genuine person but it doesn't negate his patriarchal behaviour.


A few weeks ago, a long-haired white hippie boy bailed my girlfriend up outside "lentil as anything", about her t-shirt which read: "I was at Woomera – Ask me what I saw". Initially he seemed interested in listening, but then used it as an opportunity to launch into a diatribe about middle-eastern men in Sydney raping a white womyn and how sexist they all were. So isn't that concerning, letting "them" into the community. He actually maintained that there was a conspiracy of all middle-eastern people to rape white womyn as an act of war in connection with the September 11 bombings. He and his mate were condescending, dismissive and borderline aggressive (following us down the street and refusing to let us leave the conversation). He kept trying to tell us that we weren't feminist enough, that we didn't care enough about the womyn being raped. But when my girlfriend pointed out that perhaps rape was less about the race of the attacker and more about the gender, he took great offence. When it came down to it, his problem was with them being Muslim, not so much with them being rapists. I got pretty enraged (he was so "sensitive male") and ended up yelling at him to "go put a fucken suit on, you hypocritical white male".
I'm sick of anti-refugee people saying: "look how they treat 'their' women", implicitly sanctioning the sense of 'ownership' that is one of the most insidious forms of patriarchy – in white society as well as Muslim. They never gave a fuck about the Taliban before September 11. They certainly don't know or care that many womyn in Afghanistan today still wear the burqa (covers the body with a mesh for the eyes). A womyn from RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) told us about this at the recent "Women and Earth" conference. Womyn wear the burqa so that Northern Alliance soldiers can't tell who is "young and pretty" and follow them home and rape them.
I haven't told strangers on the street about the ickier parts when I describe my encounter with A-. How would it help womyn? refugees? But it is important to talk about this as feminist womyn – the victim/perpetrator and victim/rescuer distinctions are not clear-cut and simple. Trying to be anti-sexist doesn't excuse racism, and trying to be anti-racist doesn't excuse sexism.
EXIT HERE

Thirteen Myths about Refugees
(slightly changed but predominantly plagiarised from 'Some Facts on Australia's Refugees', a Refugee Action Collective pamphlet)

Myth 1 – Boat People are queue jumpers

Fact: In Iraq and Afghanistan there are no queues for people to jump. Australia has no diplomatic representation in these countries so there is no standard refugee process where people wait in line to have their applications considered. Few countries between the Middle East and Australia are signatories to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, so asylum seekers are forced to continue to travel to other countries to find protection.



Myth 2 – Asylum seekers are illegal

Fact: Under Australian law and International a person is entitled to make an application for refugee asylum in another country when the claim to be escaping persecution. Article 14 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

Myth 3 – Australia already takes too many refugees

Fact: Australia receives few refugees by world standards. In 2001, Australia will only receive 12,000 refugees through its humanitarian program. This number has remained static for three years, despite the ever-increasing numbers of refugees worldwide. Australia accepted 20,000 refugees each year at the beginning of the 1980s. According to Amnesty International, 1 in every 115 people on earth are refugees, and every 21 seconds someone else becomes a refugee.

Myth 4 – We're being swamped by hordes of boat people

Fact: 300,000 refugees arrived in Europe to seek asylum last year. In the same year, 4174 reached Australia by boat or plane. In 2000, Iran and Pakistan each hosted over a million Afghan refugees. The real burden of assisting refugees is borne in the main by the world's poorest nations.

Myth 5 – They're not real refugees anyway

Fact: 1999 97% of refugees from Iraq and 98% from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Australia were found to be genuine refugees. Therefore, under Australian law, they are entitled to Australia.

Myth 6 – They must be 'cashed up' to pay people smugglers

Fact: It is alleged the people who have the resources to pay people smugglers could not possibly be genuine refugees. Payments made to people smugglers in fact range from $A1,000 - $5,000 (Australian), and often families and communities pool their resources in an attempt to send their relatives to safety.

Myth 7 – There is no alternative to mandatory detention

Fact: Australia is the only country that mandatorily detains asylum seekers whilst their claims for refugee status are being processed. Australia's policy of mandatory detention contravenes international conventions on civil and political rights.

Myth 8 – If we let them in they'll take our jobs, etc

Fact: A common misconception is that refugees arriving in Australia will 'steal' the entitlements of Australians. The reality is that refugees increase demand for goods and services, thus stimulating the economy and generating employment and overall economic growth. A recent study has shown that unauthorised immigration boosts the U.S. economy by $800 billion (U.S.) per year.

Myth 9 – Australia is second only to Canada in the number of refugees it takes

Fact: 71 countries accept refugees and asylum-seekers in some form or another. Of these countries, Australia is ranked 32nd.

Myth 10 – The people in the boats are terrorists

Fact: Out of more than 13,000 people who sought asylum in Australia last year, only 11 were rejected on "character grounds". Government intelligence briefings concerning terrorism have not mentioned asylum seekers. Those who carried out the September 11 attacks flew first class to America using valid papers.

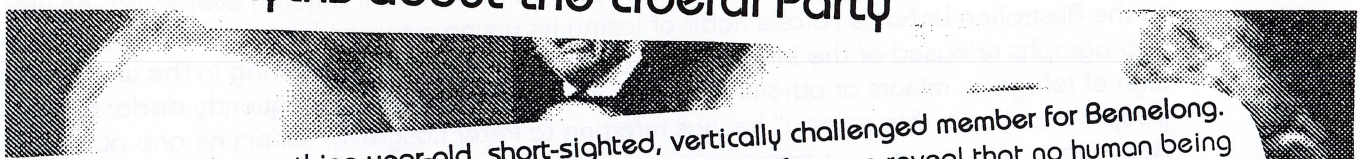
Myth 11 – Refugees should stay in the first country they come, to "join the queue".

Fact: Australia has not taken a single refugee from the UNHCR in Jakarta – from the so-called "queue" – for more than three years. Refugees cannot stay in Indonesia because Indonesia is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention.

Myth 12 – Australia is "soft" on refugees

Fact: Compared to other nations, Australia's policy of madatorily detaining refugees is hard-line. In Australia, refugees are incarcerated while their applications for citizenship are processed. If initially successful, these people receive 3-year temporary protection visas. Whilst holding these, people cannot apply to have their families join them. The current policy has not stopped people arriving. Asylum seekers come to Australia because they are fleeing persecution. Their numbers reflect the severity of the situation they are feeling, not the policies of the country they are fleeing to.

Myths about the Liberal Party



1. John Howard is a 60-something year-old, short-sighted, vertically challenged member for Bennelong. Many people have this misconception. Closer examination will of course reveal that no human being could possibly be so concerned with rooting the US President's leg, marking his legislative territory by way aimed blasts of legislative urine aimed at foreign policy, women and the environment, or so desperate to protect his own bones from any newcomers. Yes readers, John Howard is really a golden retriever.

2. The Liberal Party's 'pacific solution' is the name given to their latest method of dealing with the problem of unauthorised boat arrivals.
In fact, 'pacific solution' refers to the latest brand of laundry detergent from a large multinational (is this an oxymoron?). Designed to 'keep your whites whiter' "Pacific Solution ™" just happened to be the brand Phillip Ruddock was using to wash his jocks with when he got word of the Tampa incident. Ruddock, who as we well know has very little creative thought of his own, figured that what was good for his undies was good for 300 Middle-Eastern refugees, and the rest was history.

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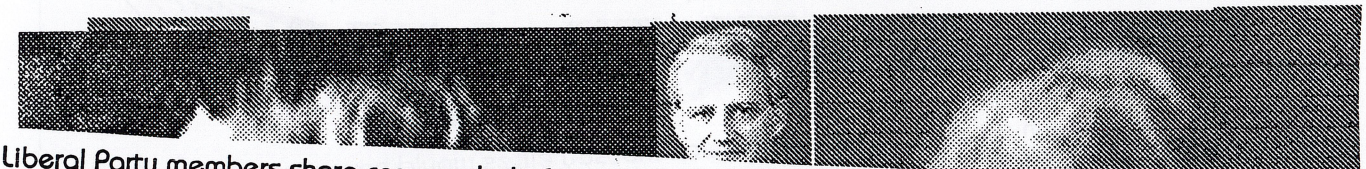
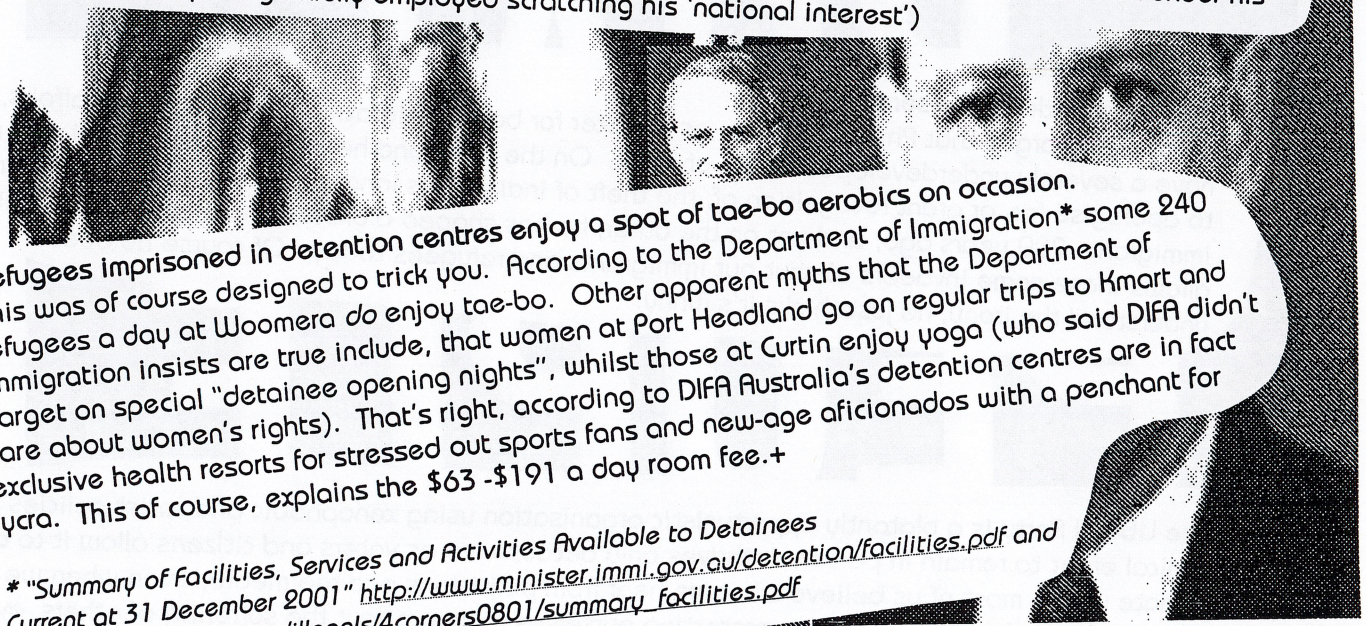


3. Liberal Party members share common beliefs in the supremacy of the individual, trade liberalisation and economical rationalisation.
Liberal Party members share very little beyond a determination to achieve the maximum governmental pension and a nasty case of thrush picked up from the Parliament House bathrooms. It is this thrush, incidentally that is responsible for pained look often on Peter Costello's face, Phillip Ruddock's increasingly flaccid demeanour and the fact that John Howard often keeps his hands hidden under his desk (where they are gainfully employed scratching his 'national interest')



4. Refugees imprisoned in detention centres enjoy a spot of tae-bo aerobics on occasion.
This was of course designed to trick you. According to the Department of Immigration* some 240 refugees a day at Woomera *do* enjoy tae-bo. Other apparent myths that the Department of Immigration insists are true include, that women at Port Headland go on regular trips to Kmart and Target on special "detainee opening nights", whilst those at Curtin enjoy yoga (who said DIFA didn't care about women's rights). That's right, according to DIFA Australia's detention centres are in fact exclusive health resorts for stressed out sports fans and new-age aficionados with a penchant for lycra. This of course, explains the $63 -$191 a day room fee.+

* "Summary of Facilities, Services and Activities Available to Detainees Current at 31 December 2001" http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/detention/facilities.pdf and http://www.immi.gov.au/illegals/4corners0801/summary_facilities.pdf

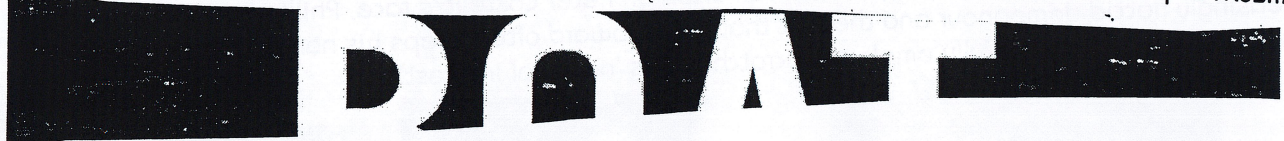
\+ The Age 16/06/02

5. The "Children overboard affair" was cynical, xenophobic tactic on defenceless refugees designed by the liberal party to help them win the election.
In fact, when Peter Reith told John Howard, "they've thrown their children overboard" he was referring to the Australian Defence Force's habit of losing its young crewmembers at sea. This explains why the photographs released of the incident show only a young sailor floundering in the water, without any sign of refugees, minors or otherwise. Thus, when John Howard subsequently declared "we don't want people like that in this country" he was referring to Peter Cosgrove, whom no one at all wants in Australia.

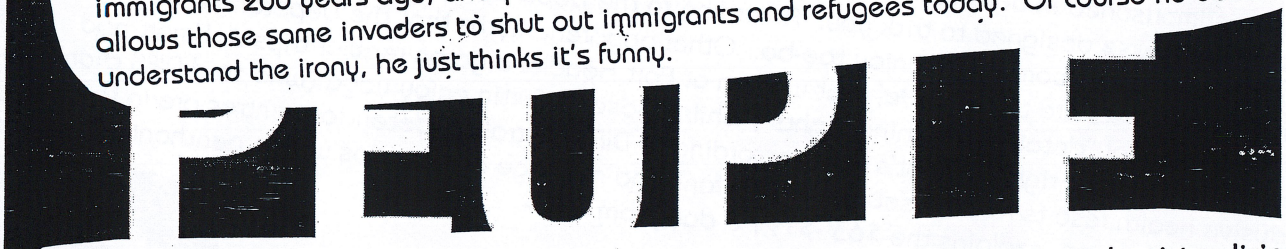
6. Photographs of refugees were banned so that they were not unduly 'humanised' in the eyes of the Australian public.
The real story is that Phillip Ruddock and Peter Costello, seizing on a way to make up some of the budget shortfall left after Costello's unfortunate 2 billion dollar loss on the international currency market (his tip was a sure thing, honest) have sold the refugees to an international advertising agency. Since their images are now copyrighted for use in multi-million dollar 'Save the Children' and Poor People for Jesus" ad campaigns, unauthorised photographs are, naturally, not allowed.

7. The Liberal Government ordered the Navy to kidnap refugees from their boats in international waters then bullied and bribed Nauru and PNG into taking them off their hands.
Actually Nauru was very grateful to have 1000 new people. Although Nauru is so impoverished that there isn't even enough water for the refugees and it must be imported from the Solomon Islands, the refugees do come in handy as convenient plugs for the holes left dotting the island after Nauru's mining industry collapsed. Because of global warming, their holes were filling with salty water which was leaking into the surrounding area, but a couple of refugees thrown down each hole stops them up nicely. (Of course the $20 million offered by Australia didn't hurt either.)

8. The Liberal Party is anti-immigration
The chattering middle-class mob compassion industry elites would have you believe that the Liberal Party just doesn't like immigration. Nothing could be further from the truth. Refugees from South Africa and Zimbabwe are always welcome, as long as they're white and rich. And you can bet your ass that the moment Beckham or Ronaldo arrives in a boat from Indonesia, Ruddock himself will be down at the dock shaking their hands. Hell, they'd even take half of Turkey's soccer club, and they're Muslims. When's the next World Cup again?



9. Phillip Ruddock has no sense of irony.
Some would argue that Phillip Ruddock, as minister for both immigration and indigenous affairs, must have a severely underdeveloped sense of irony. On the one hand he presides over a policy of refusal to apologise for, or grant recognition of, the theft of indigenous land by uninvited and unwelcome immigrants 200 years ago, and yet on the other, he has shaped a draconian fortress policy that allows those same invaders to shut out immigrants and refugees today. Of course he does understand the irony, he just thinks it's funny.



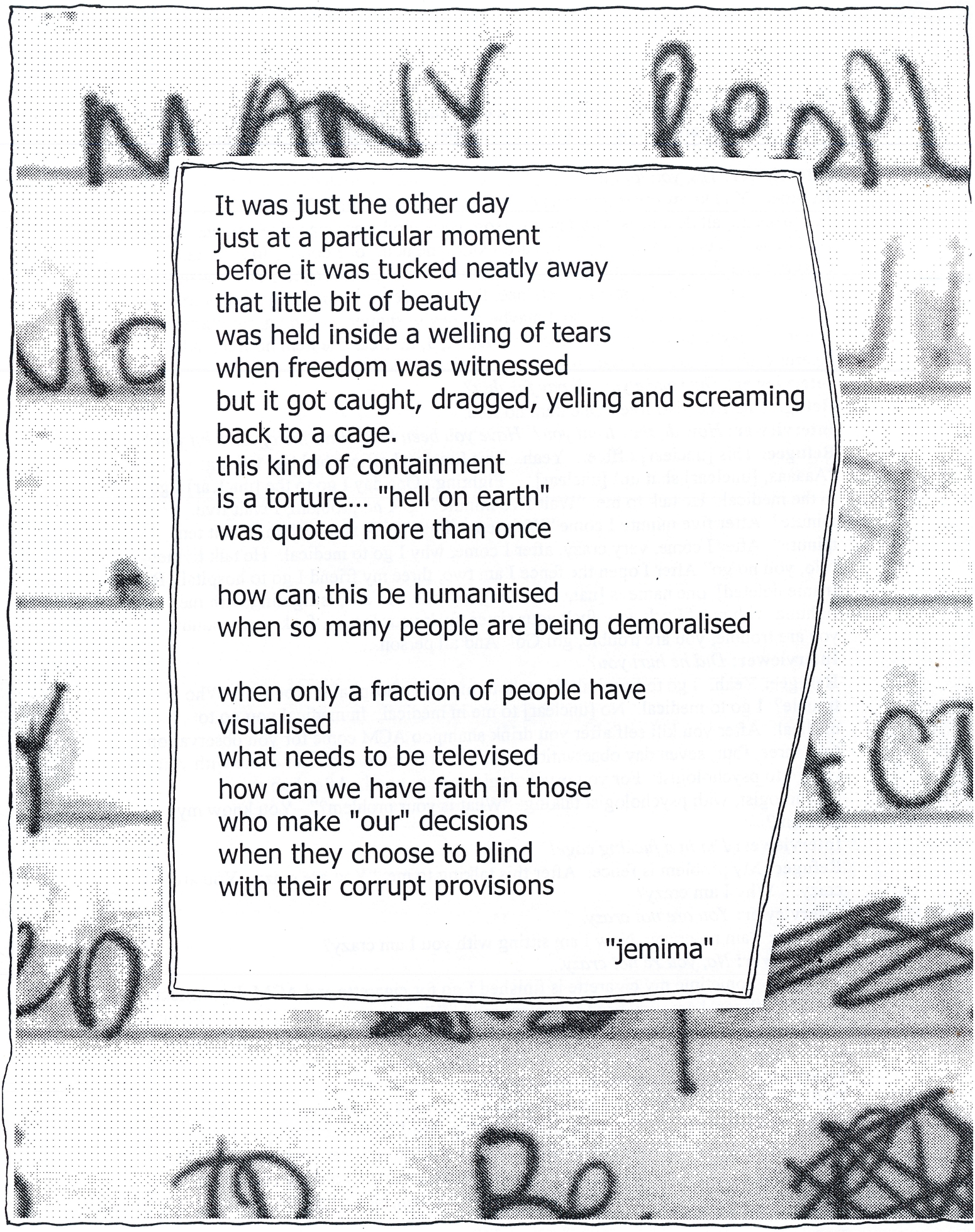
10. The Liberal Party is a blatantly opportunistic organisation using xenophobic and racist policies in a cynical effort to remain in power. It thrives only because we as voters and citizens allow it to do, in a climate where most of us believe what we hear from politicians and the media, even when we know they are biased and are too busy protecting ourselves to care about the suffering of others, even when that suffering is committed in our name.
This, unfortunately, is true.

Interview with escapee from Woomera Detention Centre,
recorded on Saturday 30th March, 2002

Refugee: All person is drinking eating glass and… all person is crazy but this is… ACM is talking with me, bad bad talking: "You are very hungry you are very bad you shut up and fuck you fuck your country". All day and night and I no sleep. In hospital I kill myself I drink shampoo. I go hospital, doctor take for me tablet two day and night sleep sleep sleep this very strong drugs take to me this very strong tablet take to me day and night I sleep very disturbed, very tired. This ACM is very bad and this detention centre is very bad. My father and my two brother kill Taliban I come for peaceful life. This is no detention centre this is jail. This is no DIMA this is no ACM this is same Taliban, same Taliban. DIMA and ACM is same Taliban. But today I am very happy, I no look to fence. I like Australian people I like Australian country I like Australian land I like, but today I am sitting with Australian people I am very happy I am very very happy but I no like Immigration Department I no like Phillip Ruddock and John…
Interviewer: *There's a lot of Australian people who don't like them either.*
Refugee: Yeah. And John Howard and other one, ACM department, all is no good, all person is crying day and night no sleeping children is crying. Children is crazy and woman is crazy and man is crazy. All person is crazy. ACM role is very bad role, ACM is very bad people. The ACM manager, what is the manager name? Peter McIntosh. Peter McIntosh is very bad man. Peter McIntosh is very bad man. Peter McIntosh is very bad man. But all ACM is very bad. I come for peaceful life I no come for jail.
Interviewer: *Thankyou for your story. What is important is what you were saying about the hashish from [name deleted]. It is important that we get that clearly.*
Refugee: No hashish.
Interviewer: *No hashish.*
Refugee: Is other one, gunja. Same leaf, marijuana, gunja.
Interviewer: *So it makes you like wooooh?*
Refugee: Yeah yeah yeah. All person smoking.
Interviewer: *So, so funny cigarettes?*
Refugee: Yeah. In detention centre, cigarette ACM bring for me.
Interviewer: *ACM sell you gunja?*
Refugee: Yeah yeah. A C M, A C M. ACM is very bad.
Interviewer: *Do you pay them for gunja? You give them money?*
Refugee: Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah. Smuggler, ACM is smuggler. I have no dollar, I have no dollar. I call to one person who outside, he bring for this officer dollar and this officer bring for detainee drugs, marijuana, gunja, hashish. All detainees smoking hashish… All ACM is smuggler, all is smuggler.
Interviewer: *Do the children? Do they sell them to the children?*
Refugee: Yeah. Yeah. All is smoking, this one, marijuana.
Interviewer: *So everyone…*
Refugee: Yeah. Everyone is smoking.
Interviewer: *So who sells it? Is it one ACM person who sells it or is it many ACM people there who sell it?*
Refugee: I don't know. For me one person but for this other person, for this other person, for this other person. I don't know.

Interviewer: *Right, ok. And it is ok if we take what you have told us and share it with other people? Is that ok? What you have said, to us, on this tape, is that ok if we give it to other people, if we give it to the media?*
Refugee: Yeah yeah.
Interviewer: *Is that alright?*
Refugee: Yeah, give to media. This very bad. All ACM is very bad. All ACM is very bad. Peter McIntosh is very very very very… ACM boss [unclear] manager is very bad man.
Interviewer: *What are some of things – I mean I know he's done many bad things – can you give some examples of bad things?*
Refugee: Yeah. For example one day I am in the working, for example, one day I work in gardening he come with me: "You are happy?" "I am for what happy? This is happy life? This is happy life? I am no happy" "Why you no happy? Fuck you fuck your country fuck you" This is everyday
Interviewer: *He said that? He swore at you?*
Refugee: This is big officer. This [unclear]? This is no [unclear]. This is very big man. This is very big officer. This is [unclear] manager. Bad bad talking… One hour I am garderning work very hard work one dollar, one hour one dollar. This ACM manager is bad man. Why bad man? For one example, one day I working in the gardening he come to me talking "How are you my friend? How are you? Good. Fine. You are fine, you are happy?" "I am no happy! For what happy? This is detention centre this is very bad." Everytime I kill myself I drink shampoo. For me kill self good for me drinking shampoo good. For me this [unclear sentence]. I am no good, I am very sad, I am very tired. This ACM is no good. "No talking! [unclear] this. Shut up! You are very hungry man? Fuck Afghanistan! Fuck Iran! Fuck Iraq!" "Why? I come for fuck? I come for peaceful life." Thankyou, thankyou very much.
Interviewer: *Thankyou very much. How do they let you sleep in there?*
Refugee: Day and night I no sleep.
Interviewer: *Do they keep you awake?*
Refugee: Yeah yeah. Day and night. One hour I sleep, I am very tired after two day, three day I am sleep, ACM officer: "Tock tock tock. May I come in?" "I don't know. For what?"
Interviewer: *So they keep you awake?*
Refugee: Yeah. "Wake up. What is your detention number?" "For what? My visa come?" "No." Why? Why you sleeping?" "I am no sleep" "Why?" "I no sleep you are happy?" This is very bad.
Interviewer: *Do they come and wake you up at night time?*
Refugee: Night time, day time, morning time. Morning, evening, all time, all time coming, all time coming. [Unclear sentence]. "What is your detention number?" Day and night: "What is your detention number, what is your detention number, what is your dentention number". No go to hospital you talk I am very sad I am very tired I go to hospital. "No. No go. You are dangerous" Why I am dangerous?
Interviewer: *They don't let you go to the hospital because they say you are dangerous?*
Refugee: You are dangerous.
Interviewer: *What do they think you will do?*
Refugee: This talking to me: "You are dangerous, you are trouble, this trouble man, trouble." [Unclear] talk to me: "Trouble man, trouble man." "Why I trouble?" "Every Iraqi's trouble, every Irani's trouble, every Afghani's trouble." "Why? You give me visa I tell you you look me in outside. All person Iraqi go outside visa Iraqi

Irani Afghani very good people, working and peaceful life and happy life, no smuggling, you are smuggler! You are smuggler." You know hashish, bring in detention centre?
Interviewer: *Yes, you told us.*
Refugee: You know other one drugs? You are smuggler, all ACM is smuggler. But detainees no, all detainees very good person, very good, very nice nice person. ACM is very bad. Very strong, very hard hard work: one hour, one dollar. In store tape recorder and shoes and trouser. This one trouser [shows trouser], this one trouser and shirt. In store are free, come for detainee, for detainee, for refugee, in store is free, no take to me. After you fill form and maybe money in shopping coming, for many coming. Maybe $40 maybe $50 maybe $60, $2, 3, no free, one item no free. All cigarette, shirt, shoes, trouser, and other one, watch all is…
Interviewer: *They make you all pay for that?*
Refugee: no free. No free. One item no free.
Interviewer: *How do they treat you? Have you been hit? Have the officers hit you?*
Refugee: This [unclear] officer. Yeah. This [unclear] officer bad bad talking: "Aaaaaa, [unclear] shut up! [unclear]… Fighting. One day I go to the [unclear] I go to the medical. He talk to me: "Wait five minute" "OK no problem, I wait five minute" After five minute I come "Wait ten minute" "OK no problem, I wait ten minute" After I come, very crazy, after I come, why I go to medical. He talk to me: "No, you no go" After I open the fence I am two, three my friend I go to hospital. But [name deleted], one name is [name deleted], big one, tall one, is fighting with me, fighting with me, "Fuck you, fuck your sister, fuck your family, fuck your country, you are trouble, you are trouble, go! Go! And all person…
Interviewer: *Did he hurt you?*
Refugee: Yeah. I go to hospital. He talk to me in the hospital: "Trouble". Who is trouble? I go to medical. No [unclear] to me in medical. In medical you go to medical. After you kill self after you drink shampoo ACM come for you observation two, three, four, seven day observation, after observation one officer come with you you go to psychologist. For you psychologist is very good. After I go to psychologist, with psychologist talking: "What is your problem?". You know my problem?
Interviewer: *I'm in a fucking cage!*
Refugee: My problem is fence. After this talking to me: "You are crazy. You are crazy." Why I am crazy?
Interviewer: *You are not crazy.*
Refugee: I am no crazy. Now I am sitting with you I am crazy?
Interviewer: *No, you're not crazy.*
Refugee: Sometime my cigarette is finished I go for cigarette and ACM department officer "Officer, I am very tired I am very sad" "What do you want?" "Work. I work. You want I clean your room I clean your office I clean the detention centre. I work, no problem for me. I clean your room I wash your clothes. I wash…"
Interviewer: *You actually clean their rooms…*
Refugee: Yeah. I clean this detention centre. All work is working, work, of detainee, no ACM department, no working, talking saying this: "Fuck you fuck you fuck you". All is same talking officer. No officer! This no officer. Officer is good, this is very bad. But now I look Australian good people, but I accept this talking Australian people is very good. ACM department is same Taliban, same Taliban.
Interviewer: *Yeah.*
Refugee: Immigration department is same Taliban.

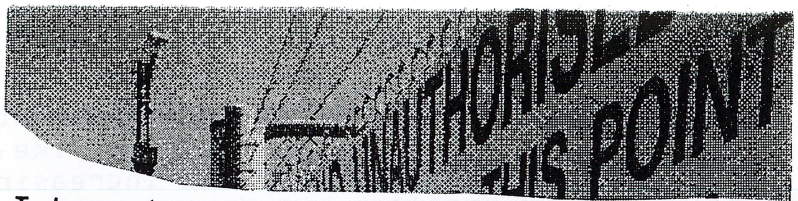


It was just the other day
just at a particular moment
before it was tucked neatly away
that little bit of beauty
was held inside a welling of tears
when freedom was witnessed
but it got caught, dragged, yelling and screaming
back to a cage.
this kind of containment
is a torture... "hell on earth"
was quoted more than once

how can this be humanitised
when so many people are being demoralised

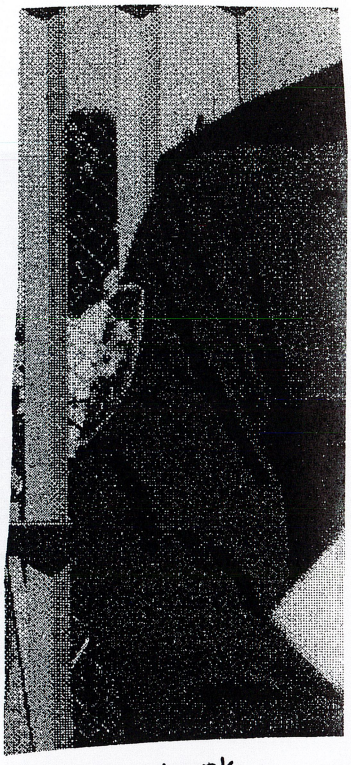
when only a fraction of people have
visualised
what needs to be televised
how can we have faith in those
who make "our" decisions
when they choose to blind
with their corrupt provisions

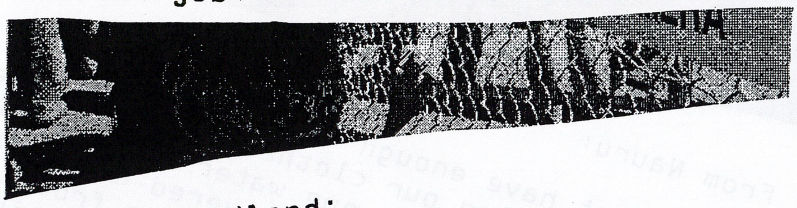
"jemima"

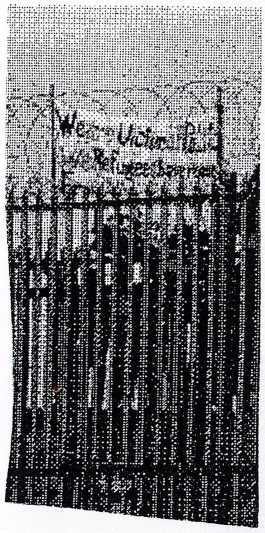


From Marybinong:

"In my life always I have been happy to be useful and I used to work hard. But now in detention centre I have to eat and sleep only and waste your taxes and my life. What a strange puzzle! I have lost all of my opportunities and really I am not able to return to Iran. And in Iran I have no place to live and I will sleep on the street. … We do not want money. We do not want gifts. We need only your hearts and your minds. … I sleep about 12 hours and eat only half meal per day. I have become only 52 kilograms and my hair has become white and I have lost two of my teeth. My memory has become very weak and I've forgotten many of the matters related to my professional job."

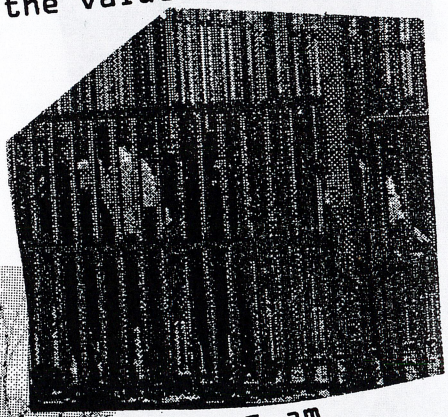


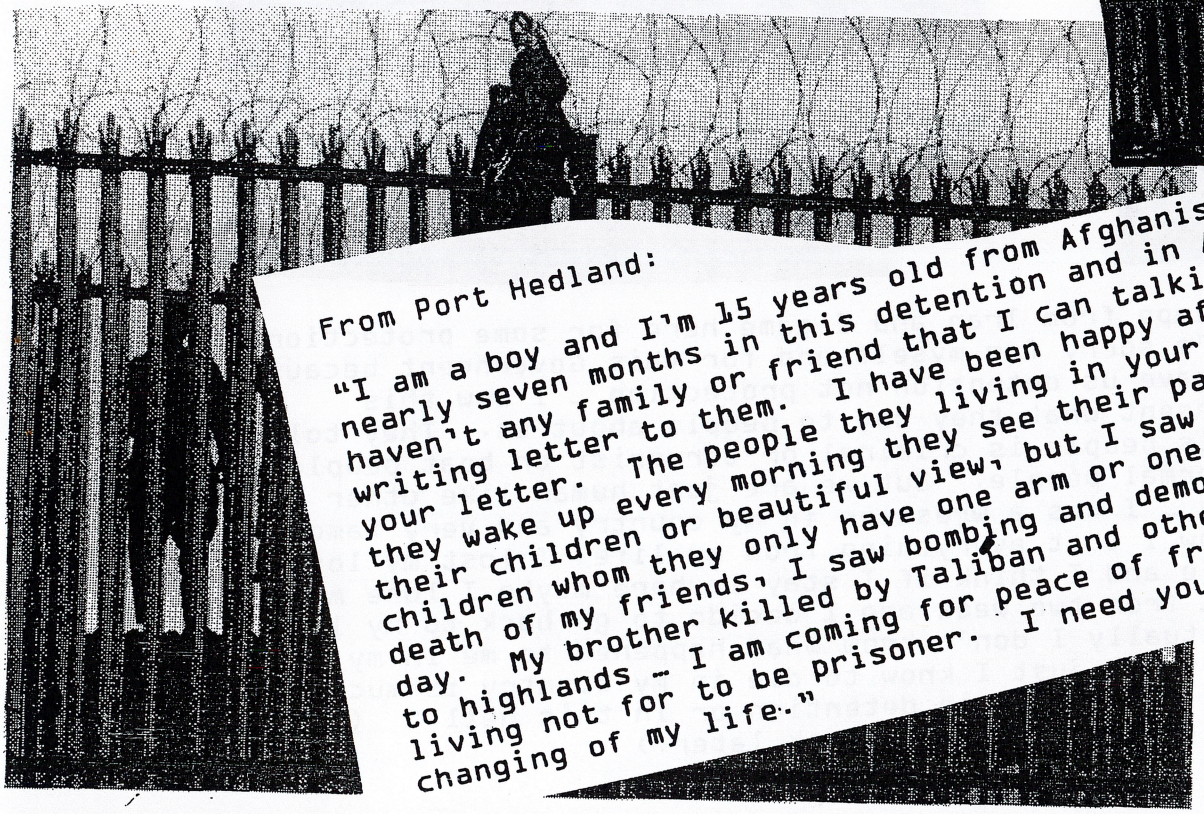




From Port Hedland:

"My dream is to be free one day … I would like to thank you again very very much for your help through sending the phone card which was very helpful because I could talk to my family … in fact I didn't expect that there are good people like you in Australia. I wanted to have friendship with people like you a long time ago because I needed a lot while I'm getting bad treatment from ACM staff because they don't recognise the value of humans and they are Australians."



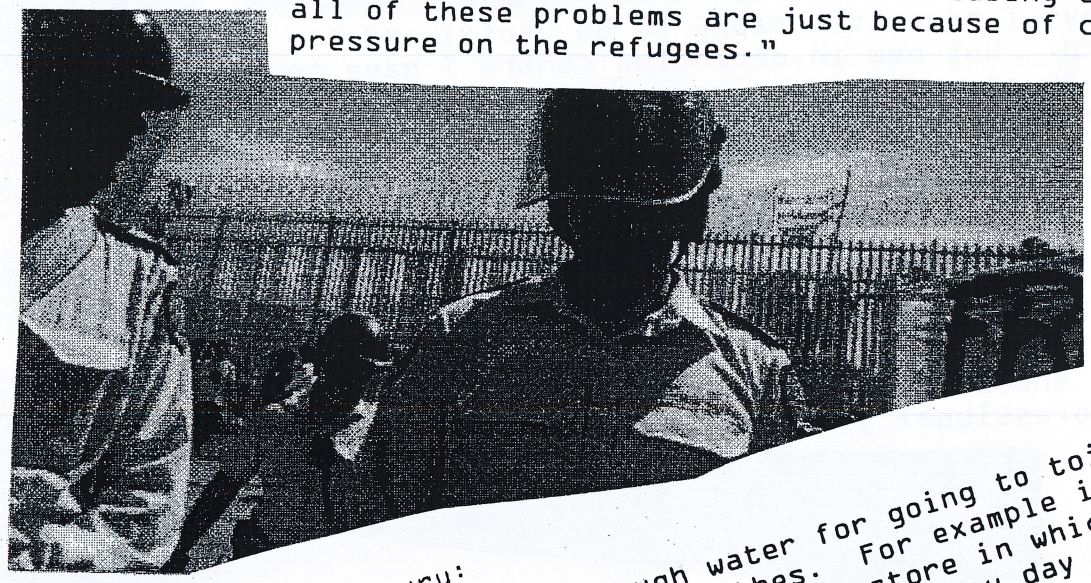


From Port Hedland:

"I am a boy and I'm 15 years old from Afghanistan … I am nearly seven months in this detention and in Australia I haven't any family or friend that I can talking or writing letter to them. I have been happy after received your letter. The people they living in your country … they wake up every morning they see their parents or their children or beautiful view, but I saw blood and the children whom they only have one arm or one leg. I saw death of my friends, I saw bombing and demolition every day. My brother killed by Taliban and other one ran away to highlands – I am coming for peace of freedom for calm living not for to be prisoner. I need your help for changing of my life."

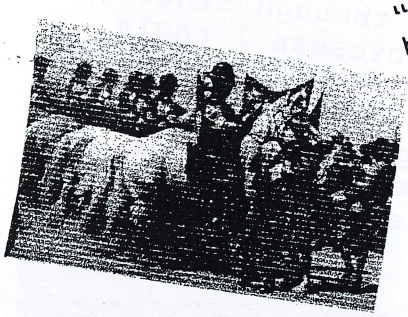
From Maribyrnong:

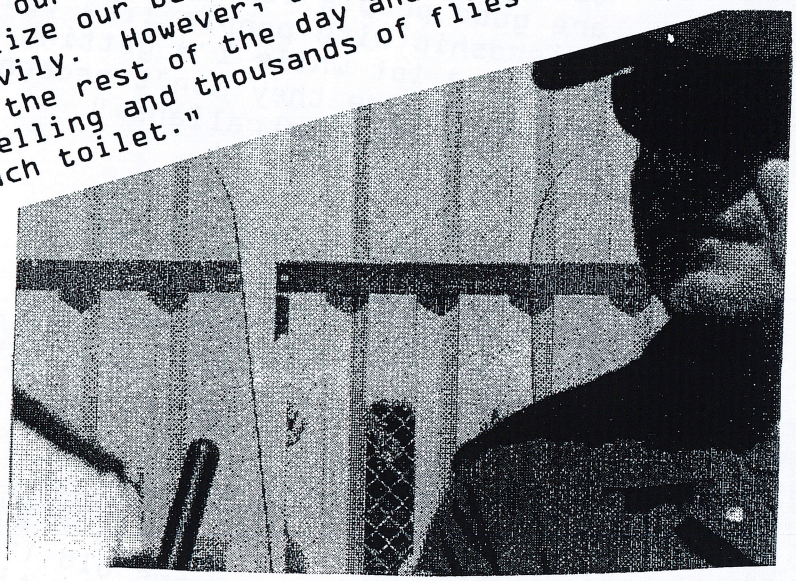
"Unfortunately today in Australia detention centres we see hundreds of people do hunger strike, riots, suicides, so many mentality problems and increasing every day and all of these problems are just because of contempt and pressure on the refugees."



From Nauru:

"We do not have enough water for going to toilet, taking bath and washing our clothes. For example in one corner of the camp there is one water store in which most often only one water tank is delivered every day and here are almost 500 people consuming water from the same tank. An interesting story is that when Mr Philip Ruddock came here our water stores were all full. And we tried to utilize our best. Most of us take bath when it rains heavily. However, the water is spent very soonly. And in the rest of the day and night our toilets are awfully smelling and thousands of flies and mosquitoes are in each toilet."





"I escape from Iran and I came here for some protection but I'm sorry for myself and for this Government because they gave us detention not protection … I saw this Government what they say to people about us. They told us this people is criminal or terrorist or boat people is not normal people. But we are just human like other people … I was a wrestler in my country and very famous … but now I lost everything from my life, I lost my love, my life and I think if I stay in here maybe I lose my mind … from two week ago I decide to go back to my land and actually I don't know what happened to me in my country but just I know to die in my country is much better than death in detention or in this hell." (The writer was deported one week later.)

Pen friends for activists

I think it is really important to write to (and visit if you can) people imprisoned in immigration detention centres.

There are lists of people in detention that are going around. Your letters do mostly get through, and letters do come back. Ask around for an updated list or email the refugee rights lawyer Julian Burnside at refugees@julianburnside.com .

It's actually really easy to write and it does not take that much time. The first letter seems hard, but you would introduce yourself and ask if they want to write back. Think of it as pen friends for activists. For example, you'd say Dear X (or Friend if you only have their ID number), you'd say my name is X, I am a .... And so on. I feel really sad about what the government is doing and I think what they're doing is wrong. More and more people think that now etc. etc. I'd like to write to you if you would like to, and be your friend. I know it's not much, but if I can help in any way I'd like to. Etc. Best love + wishes to you – X.

It's a good idea to write to a few people, but not too many at once, as you could either get through to no one or get really inundated! Maybe you could type and photocopy the initial ones and sign or write your name. Don't worry about using English, you'd be surprised at the level of English people in detention have (many having learnt it before they came to Australia). People also translate for each other, too. It's nice if you know or are choosing to learn other languages (e.g. Arabic and Persian (Farsi, Dari) cover the Middle East fairly well). Include a stamped self-addressed envelope. If you're writing to someone in Nauru or elsewhere overseas, include with an envelope an "International Postage Certificate", from Australia Post, redeemable for a stamp for a letter back to Australia.

You might not think you have very much to offer, especially if you're not very well off and can't help much financially in sending gifts. But what's most important is hope, hearing outside people, being friends, gives hope, and that is the single thing they have been most deprived of.

Refugees inside the Centres are told by ACM that people outside know about them but don't care or hate them, so just writing and explaining how many don't know what's going on and that many really do care, is really powerful.

In writing and visiting, you gain a friend or friends, some of whom may one day be free in Australia. Also, learning about and talking to people from other cultures is a really valuable life skill. If you're shy or think you might stuff up or not know what to say, hell, in letters you have all the time to think about what to say and it gets easier by the time you might be visiting or speaking on the phone. Take a deep breath and plunge in! It's hard to say something wrong when your essential link is humanity.

We sent a big parcel to a family in Curtin, who had requested of us a few things they needed. At the stupidmarket we got tobacco and heaps of textas and stickers. We stapled together lots of booklets of different coloured paper and plain sticker paper and taped the edges, and found a nice second-hand scarf as a headscarf, also a few little toys. We heard that the mother expressed so much joy that we had thought of her and her family and sent these things.

Talk about your correspondence to others. Inspire people! Tell the media! And parents and their friends and other "middle Australians" have been known to start writing as a non-confrontational good samaritan act and get increasingly disgusted and active about the government's mandatory detention policy.

Do not take away a person's hope – they may have nothing else. - Persian proverb

A bit o' criticism of us activisty people

Also, from a different angle, I think it is important for refugee activists to actually talk to, interact with, learn from, be friends with, the people on whose behalf they are fighting for.

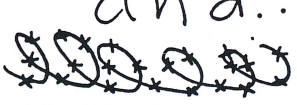
I think that it is perfectly possible to be incensed and disgusted at the government's treatment of refugees and fight against the government and mainstream Australia's apathy, without seeing a real need to interact with refugees themselves. They are made martyrs; their experiences are a clear-cut example of why the militaristic right-wing scum-bags are just that. I am not saying that this tendency means that you don't care (or that they ain't scum-bags), hell, you wouldn't be facing down police horses if you didn't, but the interaction is quite one-way. It's quite another challenge to really talk to the people who have become a disembodied and anonymous mass in the media for and against them. I think also that there's a danger in losing our ability to maintain our rage about mistreatment of people in detention, it becomes quite abstract after a while, another thing that's fucked in the world. We end up distancing ourselves from the people involved and possibly losing inspiration or momentum. Maybe it's easier to cope that way, when you aren't wondering what's happened to H, or how A is doing, but hey, we have to cope and we have to act.

> *We were demonstrating on M1 2002 outside the Maribyrnong Detention Centre, with us the protesters separated by a fence from the refugees crowded in a barred window, looking out at us with the police trying to block our view. There was such a barrier between us and them, in so many different ways (iron bars, language, culture, freedom, experience). It was amazing to see one of the activists call out to them by name, asking how they were going, and saying that she'd see them on Saturday. She visits people inside the Centre every week.*

Maybe "the refugees" (yes, people can be Othered so easily even with the best of intentions), from other cultures and perspectives, just wouldn't understand or approve of our ferally radical selves. We are so used to being blanket opposed to the mainstream (nuclear family, doesn't recycle, homophobic, patriarchal, drives cars, racist, wants to fit in, wants to be rich, likes dumb movies) and advocating on behalf of a silent minority (maybe who can't hear or won't listen to us), that talking to refugee people in detention doesn't occur automatically as something to do. It can seem "inefficient" (Seven of Nine, anyone?) to spend the time to talk to individuals and be their friend, when the movement is about ending mandatory detention for all. There are many forms of opposition to the locking up of refugees, and there are many forms of resistance to the ending of detention. Apathy, ignorance, misinformation, hatred, resentment, scape-goating, anger. All these come from a fundamental inability to see the people locked up in detention as fully, laugh/cry/joke/wonder/create, individual human beings.

"They're just different from us" is something I have heard so many times. Talking about individual people, their stories, how they have reacted personally to detention, their friendship with you, whether addressed to your (initially dubious?) parents, friends, workmates, acquaintances who may tell others, whether as articles, books, zines, interviews, whether addressed to hundreds or thousands at a rally, or in other ways, these stories are hard to ignore and refute.

Ruddock's dehumanisation tactics are working, and countering this by portraying people as having the simple aggregate identity of those who passively and abjectly suffer (as sometimes there is a tendency to do...), <u>will</u> only work so far. Humanising involves giving accounts of people inside as specific individuals with varying stories, who are being totally and unreasonably detained and treated like scum through no action of their own. This is vital in the huge task of angering and motivating Australians to bloody get off their arses and tear down the detention centres!!!



* consulting with people <u>before</u> doing major actions on their behalf is not only polite but in their best interests!

~~Dear~~ ☆ ☆ ☆ 7/7/02

Hello: I receved your Letter on 2/7/02. I appreciate for your feeling about us. Now I writing some information about us, I am 32 years old. I have husband and Two children one dugther 9 years and one boy 3 years. her name is P and his name is P. we are Iranian and we have been 20 months in the detention center. I am beautition I had callabarated with grope cinematic in Iran, I am progment I have Two months. I and my husband and my children are living in a room 280 cm x 250 cm. but I thing some people in the AUSTRALIA don't Pat even their dogs in to this small room. nearly 6 months ago in the camp's area There was a conflict between Two persons very hard my son was playing near there. P very afraid and beshoched he had started to speaking. but after this happening he became stammering. but about P she must go to school and play with her classmate. but now she is like a bird in the cage. we have seen Two christmas in the camp she has watched

the christmas's ceremeny on the T.V, when children with their parents going to shops, when they dance and exposition in the streets but I must look at your world from inside of the Prison. Is this fair? I hope you can send my voice to Australian people you tell him what is our sin? I want you belive me. I write for you some part of my life and my family in the camp, but I hope don't besad of my adversit life. I hope evry thing will be ok one day.

whit love

her name

her beautiful signature

ACM MAFIA

From Maribyrnong

"I was received your letter and I was happy so much … please you give information about our situation to Australians, because some people have not any information about detention centres. Today I had two visitors who came to my visit for the first time, one of them was journalist and another was a girl - 25 years old. They had not any information about detention centres and couldn't believe and the girl was crying after we talked to her … we don't must look our situation like sentimental people, and you must look very deeply to these circumstances, so that what we are eating and we have a lot of suffering are on the second level. The first level is you must see why the people are coming here and why for a long time are staying in detention centres … we don't must be sensitive and don't must cry, because the cry make happy the enemy. … I will write for you difference between camp and zoo. In the zoo, the humans to care for animals; but in detention centre the animals to care for humans."

I'm sorry if this sounds hard but I've never heard of stories of refugees from Europe threatening suicide 50 years ago. Is that because they were genuine?
Eileen Tubb, Eaglehawk

YA-25

* we were in phone contact with this man. he said the govt. had told him if he didn't sign the agreement to be sent back to Afghanistan with $2000, he would be forcibly deported. he signed. he was going to ring us when he got to the Perth detention centre where he was being flown. that was weeks ago. we have not heard from him since.

Dear ☆ ☆

Thank you very much for your latter which I received on Tuesday 2nd July 02.

Really I got pleased when I read your latter and you let me know that there are many Australians who are thinking about us in detaintion centers.

My name is Z ☆ ☆ ☆ and I am a 28 years old man with two sonnes.

I am from Afghanistan. It is two years I am in Australia detaintion center.

My application has been refussed from all preeess and you may know situation in detaintion is very difficult. Since I left my family in Afghanistan I don't know about them, how are they and what is going on with them.

Anyway, when I am thinking here in detaintion I belive that there is no more chance for me and get hopless but sometimes when I see on T.V or hear that out said people are protesting about refugees then I think that once the governament policy will be changed and I will be released from these bars.

Once again thank you very much for your latter and I thank alot from all Australians who are thinking about us in detaintion and I hope you be all right.

Best wishes

your friend Z ☆

YF-26

MOTHER'S DAY GREETINGS FROM

WOOMERA

For many mothers just like this one, Mother's Day won't be a time for celebration.

259 women and 365 children will spend Mother's Day in Detention Centres in Australia, an unknown number will do the same in Nauru and PNG. Please help stop our barbaric treatment of refugees. All families deserve a future.

SMASH poster put up around Melbourne for Mother's Day

~ Women Refugees ~

According to the Department of Immigration there were 174 women in detention in Australia as of February of this year. But this figure isn't accurate. It doesn't include women in Nauru or PNG for a start. These women are being held at Australia's behest, by private security firms paid by Australia and Australian support staff. One report I read said that at times there are more Australians in Nauru's capital than Nauruans. From all reports there are many women (and children) in Nauru and PNG, a much higher percentage than in mainland camps. This is because since TPV holders have been banned from participation in the Family Reunion scheme, many women who already have relatives in Australia have been forced to take the same dangerous boat journey as their husbands and fathers, whilst new families are coming together, knowing it might be their only chance. They say that the boat that sank on its way to Christmas Island last year was heavily loaded with women and children for just such reasons. Women who perished in huge numbers leaving their men to mourn alone, in Australia already.

I've been trying to research the true numbers of women in detention for 2 months now. I'm still yet to find any figures on the number of women (or children) in offshore detention. Why is the information so hard to find? Why is *any* information about the particular circumstances and treatment of women in detention so hard to find?

Without facts, all we are left with is allegations, many of them serious and from credible sources. There are allegations (most recently in *The Age* on Sat 6 July, 2002) that pregnant women in Woomera have been forced to have caesareans unwillingly, against their will or without their informed consent. This is very serious, forcing women to undergo a surgical procedure without consent is an assault, a major breach of medical ethics and a violation of women who surely have already been victimised and traumatised in their home countries. To continue that violation here, in the place they have come to for protection is reprehensible.

There are allegations that women have been abused in the Detention Centres, maybe even raped. It is certainly a fact that women have been among the people tear gassed, water-cannoned and beaten by guards who are trained to see them as prisoners and criminals. (see ABC news online and the Department of Immigration's own website). It is also true that women are so infantilised they are not even allowed their own supply of sanitary pads, but must go to the nurse each day and ask for their daily ration.

At Woomera, DIFA reports that women attend compulsory 'life skills' classes. These classes include:

HEALTH
Women's health subjects: Worming prevention and treatment; First aid talks; Prevention of snake and spider bites, Sun & heat protection, Water consumption during summer; Importance of exercise; Nutrition for the whole family; Breast care and pap smears; How to manage colds & flu.
SEX
Facts about sex, Pregnancy, birth, Puberty, Female & male reproductive systems, infants, Antenatal education; the treatment of children; STD prevention.
HYGIENE
Toileting and respecting others; Effective hand washing and the prevention of disease

What sort of message does it give about the way the government views refugee women when it finds it necessary to teach them how to wash their hands, or the facts of life? How insulting is it to teach women "nutrition for the whole family" when refugees at Woomera have no choice in what they eat (and at least one report has them being given only coleslaw morning, noon and night for at least one month straight)?

These women don't need to be taught 'life skills' or the treatment of children. By surviving and making it to Australia with their families they already know more about life than any of us.

Australia uses the definition of refugee found in the United Nations Refugee Convention:

> [o]wing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

You are a refugee if you fear persecution because of your "race, religion, nationality [or] membership of a particular social group". Sexual discrimination and persecution of women is not, in itself a 'convention reason' for the granting of refugee status, at best women may qualify as being a member of the "particular social group" of women. Australia has officially signalled that this is what it will do, but in practice the Refugee Review Tribunal has shown that it wants more than that. Being a woman is not enough. Yet in Afghanistan (even after the Taliban), Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, women can't vote, run for public office or divorce without their husband's permission. In Saudi Arabia they can't even drive. In Iran women can run for public office (and many have) but if they are seen outside their houses without a headscarf or chador, they will be beaten and perhaps imprisoned. All over the world women are the subject of 'honour' killings. In Pakistan recently a woman was gang raped on the authority of a tribal council in order to punish her brother for his having a relationship with a woman 'above his station'. And yet, if a Saudi woman was to apply for refugee status on the grounds that, as a woman she can't drive, work without her husband's or father's permission, vote, wear what she chooses or live where she liked, she would be turned away. None of this, according to the RRT, constitutes persecution if you are a woman.

What does DIFA have to say about all this? Back in January of this year, a number of articles criticising the treatment of women in Detention Centres appeared in the mainstream media. DIFA issued a letter to the editor (http://www.immi.gov.au/letters/letters02/age_0602.htm) reporting that there weren't that many women in detention anyway, as if it's ok because the abuse is only happening to 258 women. What number of abused women is too many, according to DIFA? How many can you just sweep under the carpet? And in response to all the allegations? DIFA reports that specialised services *have* been set up for women in the various detention centres. These services including, yoga, aerobics and 'life skills' classes. In response to serious allegations of abuse and mistreatment, the best the department can do is offer yoga. Not only that but DIFA has the nerve to crow about it. To write letter to the editor saying how great they are for offering it. It's like they have no brains at all.

I wanted to learn more about women refugees in Australia. I wanted to understand the experience of the two teenage girls who called out to me from behind the wire at Woomera at Easter. I wanted to tell people about the women who gave birth at the Royal Melbourne Hospital last month. She's been flown in from the camp in Nauru and sent straight to Maribyrnong. A witness at the hospital tells me that she gave birth with 5 armed guards in the room, and that even her newborn baby was guarded 24 hours a day in the neo-natal ward. In seeking I instead found more allegations than answers, and what answers I found made me sick. Women are hidden away in detention centres, their stories untold, a sort of ironic Australian purdah we force onto them, keeping them silent and alone. People need to know about these issues and these women. There really is no excuse not to learn. We might not have all the information, but what is there is readily available. Get online and look up 'women refugees', hell, even the mainstream press is starting to run these stories. If we don't educate ourselves to speak out and for these women, who will? We become complicit in their abuse and Australia's silence.

All I want to say about Woomera:

While I'm sitting in my nice inner city share house gossiping about the latest scandal in student politics people are locked up in cages in the middle of the desert. Sitting there, every day, staring out through the bars, through the razor wire at desert in every direction. People who have fled circumstances I can't even imagine and arrived, against all odds, safely on these shores, only to be incarcerated in one of our home grown, all-Australian versions of a concentration camp. Before I went to Woomera I could wax lyrical about the "refugee issue" from all sorts of angles. Would engage with people who support mandatory detention, and try to argue them around. I can't do that at the moment. I want people to change their minds, but this is no longer an abstract political "issue" for me. I don't know what to say to people anymore.

All I can think about are the faces of the people I saw behind the bars at Woomera. I keep hearing the cries of the woman who couldn't stop screaming "I've been in here for three years. Please get me out! Get me out!" I think about the fact that children are born and spend the first years of their lives behind razor wire.

It's wrong.

That's all. There is nothing more to say. There should be nothing more to say. Why isn't that enough? What the fuck is with people, when that isn't enough? There is nothing more to say when that is not enough.

- Nareeda

FREE KOKATHA LAND

This is the start of a speech given by Rebecca Bear-Wingfield, a senior Arbunna Kokatha woman on Saturday 30th of March, 2002, at Woomera, the day after an unknown number of detainees escaped into the protest camp

I'm Rebecca Bear-Wingfield. I'm an Arbunna Kokatha woman, and I'm sitting here today with my nephew Leigh. He's Leigh Wingfield, and he's come up here to help me talk about some of the issues of concern to the Kokatha people. We're not far from the refugee centre, where there are, as much of the Australian public and the international public know, refugees located here. We're here to talk about human rights issues, and particularly redefine how human rights impact upon indigenous Australians and how they also influence and impact upon these refugees. Successive Australian governments have always been in breach of human rights in terms of their treatment of indigenous Australians, and one of the things that I think is really important to get into the public domain, onto to the public agenda is, "if they can't get it right for indigenous Australians, they're going to be very limited in their ability to deal with proper human rights for refugees. Until we get that basic understanding that we come from a community and an Australian society that grows up with unfortunately very strong learning of lack of tolerance of people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, that we just are not going to break through this cycle of oppression. It's a global issue, and we really share the concerns of these people becoming displaced and dislocated in this country.

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Historically, we didn't move through indigenous or islander aboriginal people's country without permission. And even today in this 21st century, before I go travelling, I always ask the local people "do you mind if I come?" That is something that we do out of respect. People coming here to Woomera who have come from overseas they come into a very difficult area. This is a militarised zone. It has been for a number of years. This is stolen land. It was stolen from my grandparents. This is Kokatha people's Country. This land was stolen to open up the Woomera long range rocket range in the '50s, and also to explode nuclear bombs up at Emu Junction in 1953, two atmospheric bombs. There was also periods of atomic bombs at Maralinga. We currently Kokatha people seeking compensation, plus also discussions will need to take place with both the British and the Australian government about the long term consequences of these bombs and the impact it now has on the health of, in the first instance, my family, but also for other families that have been affected, such as the Stanley reserve (unclear) and other non-indigenous people who lived in the area. The implications for Australia as a whole have not been fully understood. There were quite significant recordings of radioactivity across Australia, and in fact Australia, and South Australia itself has the highest level of cancer in the western world.

"The implications [of the nuclear testing] for Australia as a whole have not been fully understood... South Australia itself has the highest level of cancer in the western world".

We're dealing with the fact that as Kokatha people we have no rights to negotiate sovereignty, or indeed have a say, about what activities are undertaken here in this Country. We've had to struggle right back about the establishment of the largest uranium mine, Olympic Dams. We're not happy with that being built. My mother lay down under the bulldozers to try and stop that land happening.

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We're facing a big issue. We're taking up the responsibility to challenge everything globally, and to start talking to anyone, and start educating people about the ramifications for global genocide with the continued mining operations and the plans for expansion of this uranium mine. We're concerned that uranium from Roxby is used in wars globally, and that it might also have been used in areas such as the Gulf war, and in Kosovo, on the uranium depleted bullets. We're calling for all Australians to call for Australia to be declared a nuclear free country. We don't want uranium from the Kokatha people's country being used to cause any more genocide, and we want to have Aboriginal rights, and

human rights, and Aboriginal sovereignty understood fully in this land.

There's been a bit of a difficulty this weekend, and it's important that this is spoken about. There have been some issues that would alarm people. They have also alarmed some of my old people. When the protesters wrote to my mother and also spoke to myself about coming to Woomera to do a protest about the refugee status here in this country, my mother and I had absolutely no problem. We were the first ones to say that it's absolutely essential that this happen: that the world needs to hear, and John Howard needs to be told that we're not happy with his policies – and also Mr. Philip Ruddock. However, we did ask that respect was shown for Kokatha people, and to come into the Country in the right way, with peace and respect. Unfortunately it is emotional, people are traumatised on both sides of the fence, and now I feel the refugees have escaped, and that now makes it very difficult for further dialogue to happen. And we ask people to please respect that it may seem that in the short term, a solution, but in the long term this is an extremely complex issue that we are dealing with. We are dealing with a government that is yet to acknowledge, and continues to deny that it is abusing it's role as a signatory to the Human Rights and the Rights of the Child. The first thing that we, as Kokatha people want to say, and state emphatically, emphaticaly, is that we want the children out of the detention centre, and the parents, particularly the women, also given a better environment in which to deal with this issue.

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A lot of the people come out of a war zone. For Aboriginal people, for Kokatha people, we've been at war. It's not our choice, but we are in a war zone here on our own land. We are now defined as terrorists if we speak up publicly, but really we're talking about global genocide. It's a real honour that I traveled here today with some very important people in my life, my niece and nephew – this is the first time that they have come – because we're handing on the responsibility. We've now got three generations of Kokatha campaigners, human rights activists, in our family. We're having to educate our young people to have the skills and the knowledge to make decisions that have ramifications for global issues. That's a big responsibility for my family and for this nation, but we have to do it. We have to stand tall, and we're asking everybody to respect that it is a very difficult journey, but this is the only way for Australia to go. We're not going to be mature as a nation, and we're just lying to ourselves if we think that everybody in the western world, and in other countries, believes that we're getting it right in terms of human rights. I heard about this Greek man on a little island, and he took 700 families of these refugee people, and why can't we just have a bit more humanity happening here. And it's a real shame, John Howard and Philip Ruddock, because it's not even your country, and if this was done Aboriginal way, you'd be welcome *(? unclear)*, and then we'd start talking about please show respect, and understand what we're talking about, because we don't want a second set of (unclear) made by people who are coming here for various reasons. It's time we all started talking. It's not a Black/White issue. I'm here to talk about human rights for everybody.

And also for the Kokatha people, we don't want the detention centre here. We don't want people incarcerated on our land. We're incarcerated on a daily basis, just by our human rights abuses, and the kids being removed. That's our incarceration, and we don't want that happening to other people, because we know. We've got the experience first-hand. And I don't know what my nephew would like to say, but I think it's really important that we start to ask our views, for direction, because our views haven't been the ones that have been making a lot of these inappropriate decisions, and they're our vision for the future, and that's where it's at.

I think it's really important that we start to ask our views, for direction, because our views haven't been the ones that have been making a lot of these inappropriate decisions, and they're our vision for the future, and that's where it's at.

We're actually establishing a Kokatha embassy, because as Kokatha people, we don't have rights. We don't have rights of entry to walk across our Country. We have been denied access to great paths of land into the Country. Some of it has been annexed in terms of the American activities through Nerunga, and also through the British government with their nuclear testing – the proof is the establishment of the Woomera Rocket Range. Our people were rounded up and placed in other parts of our country, including Port Augusta and up at Cooper Pedy. Access has been denied to this country historically. If I took to walk across this country as my ancestors and my grandparents have done, there is a very real chance that I will be arrested once again, like my uncle, and my mum and my dad, who also have maintained our links to this land. We have the responsibility for the environment, for cultural sites, but we have been denied the right to practice our... it's religious freedom, the whole idea. It's our lives.

mp3 audio available at:
www.melbourne.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=25007

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